

IDEAS AT *Work*

COMPUTERS/HILLEL SEGAL

Clever PC program protects erased files

For the last few weeks in this column, I've discussed "Mace+Utilities," a program that helps you retrieve files that may have been accidentally erased from your personal computer's hard disk or floppy diskettes. The IBM PC and PC-compatible program compares favorably with the older "Norton Utilities" program that does some of the same things.

The trick in using either program is to retrieve the accidentally erased file before the area on the disk is used by another file. If you don't act quickly, the area on the disk is overwritten, rendering any attempt to retrieve the lost data hopeless.

Now, just when I thought that Mace+Utilities was the limit, along comes SafetyNet, a program that uses a technique to prevent erased files from being overwritten. It's available from Westlake Data, Austin, Texas, for \$54.95. When you erase an old file, it appears erased, but the file has actually been moved to a hidden directory — and remains fully intact on your hard disk or floppy diskette.

Then, when you create new files, unused areas on the disk are used instead of overwriting the previously erased files. The old files can be "brought back to life" instantly.

What happens when you begin to run out of available space on your disk? By using the purge command of SafetyNet, you see a list of all the erased files, along with the size of each and the date each file was erased. You simply move the cursor to the names of the files you want to purge, touch the space bar, and voila! The file is gone and disk space is freed. Pretty nifty, wouldn't you say?

Can SafetyNet replace the Mace+Utilities? Not completely — but it comes close. Here are the particular features of each program, with an item-by-item comparison:

✓ Installation and automatic

beats Mace+Utilities here, because it protects erased files from being overwritten. Mace+Utilities is only effective if you use the file recovery function before the space is used for another file.

✓ Unformat protection. Both provide unformat protection provided that they were installed ahead of time as a preventive measure. Mace+Utilities is better because it provides partial restoration of data even if the program was not installed beforehand.

✓ Damaged file protection. Mace+Utilities has several ways to help retrieve damaged or partially destroyed files, but the procedure is complicated and should only be attempted by experienced users. Not offered by SafetyNet.

✓ Condense feature. Mace+Utilities will rearrange the files on your hard disk so that all the pieces of each file are together. This speeds processing and makes it easier to recover erased or damaged files. SafetyNet does not have this feature.

✓ Bugs. Unfortunately, SafetyNet still contains a bug that makes the program difficult to use in one situation. I found that if you try to erase a file from a full floppy diskette, and SafetyNet does not have enough room to set up the hidden directory, it bombs! This apparently happens if the disk was filled up before SafetyNet was installed. Although an error message should appear instead, I've tried it on two computers, an IBM PC-XT and a Sperry IT, and all I get is a blank screen. The only way I was able to erase the file was to reboot, amend my autoexec.bat file so as not to include SafetyNet, reboot again, and then erase. Whew!

Aside from the bug, which I suspect will be quickly corrected now that the publishers are aware of it, I found SafetyNet a pleasure to use. If you don't want or need the better unformat protection, damaged file protection or condense



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~~Setup~~ ~~both~~ are equally easy to install and use. Once added to your "autoexec.bat" file, a batch file that's run every time you turn on your computer, you can forget about them.

✓ File retrieval. SafetyNet

features of Mace + Utilities, it's a better buy. Mace + Utilities costs \$69.95. Then again — since neither is prohibitively expensive — you may wish to play it safe and buy both. You will be protected no matter what happens.

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